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Summary record of the 16th meeting
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Chairman : Mr. Priputen (Vice Chairman) ..... (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 110: Advancement of women *(continued)*(A/58/3, A/58/38 (Supplement No. 38), A/58/161, A/58/167, A/58/167/Add.1, A/58/168, A/58/169, A/58/374, A/58/341 and A/58/417)

Agenda item 111: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" *(continued)* (A/58/13, A/58/166)

1. **Mr. Nsemi** (Congo) reaffirmed his country's commitment to all instruments adopted by the United Nations and the international community, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Violence against women, particularly sexual violence, which had taken on significant proportions owing to the conflicts that had occurred in the country, was a matter of concern for his Government. Six health centres for victims of sexual violence had been created, and medical and psychosocial services were being provided there. Pending appropriate legislative action, specific measures would be adopted for eliminating harmful traditional practices, and a change of attitude on that subject had to be achieved through education. His Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and other institutions, intended to continue the work already initiated in the spheres of education and public awareness.

2. Women constituted 52 per cent of the Congolese population and 46 per cent of the labour force; in particular, 64 per cent of persons employed in agricultural tasks in the rural areas, and produced almost 80 per cent of the food products consumed in the country. The national authorities were fully aware of the function and contribution of rural women to the promotion of agricultural development, the improvement of food security and the elimination of poverty. Women constituted an essential element of the rural workforce and, at the same time, were the ones who suffered most from poverty in that area. They were suffering from technological backwardness and lacked access to health and education services. The traditional banking sector was not easily accessible to women because of limitations in the granting of credit; nevertheless, Congolese women were benefiting from other forms of savings and credit created for the most deprived sectors of society, namely, savings and credit institutions for women, financed by UNDP as part of a project of credit systems for women in the unstructured sector. The Government supported women's activities through diversified investments. Furthermore, in the context of development of the agricultural sector, in which all the hopes of the Congo were placed, his Government had decided to invest some $US14 million in 2003 to achieve self-sufficiency in food.

3. In the legal sphere, the Constitution of 20 January 2002 clearly recognized the equality of men and women in all spheres and guaranteed the promotion and representation of both sexes in all political, electoral and administrative functions. The Constitution explicitly prohibited all types of discrimination based on origin, social or material status, membership in an ethnic, racial or regional group, education, language, religion, idiosyncrasy or place of residence. In addition, many laws guaranteed the principle of equality between men and women in access to employment, promotion and wages. At the institutional level, the actions of the Ministry responsible for the advancement of women and their integration into development were being strengthened by the coordination centres existing in the various ministerial departments, such as the Ministry of Justice, in which a gender perspective was being integrated into public administration. During the most recent legislative and Senate elections in 2002, the percentage of women had increased between 1992 and 2002 from 1.6 per cent to 9.3 per cent in the National Assembly, from 3.3 per cent to 15 per cent in the Senate, and from 3.6 per cent to 8.5 per cent in local councils. Of the 35 members of the Cabinet, five were women.

4. In the health field, the Congo had adopted in 1992 the National Health Development Plan, which included services and activities relating to reproductive health; it also included the promotion and protection of maternal and child health and community participation, placing particular stress on women's participation in the management of the health system. A National Plan for Combating AIDS had been prepared, and a National Council for Combating AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis had been created; both the Plan and the

Council fully integrated women, who played an active part in all public-awareness and training activities organized by the Government with the collaboration of non-governmental organizations. Lastly, with regard to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Congo had submitted its first five reports, combined into a single report, to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to which it was grateful for its valuable recommendations.

5. **Ms. Yakivu** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community and with that made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, had submitted three reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and was preparing its next report, which it would submit in 2004. After the Fourth World Conference on Women had been held at Beijing, women's non-governmental organizations had mobilized, with highly favourable results throughout the country, in making women aware of the 12 areas of special concern and endeavouring to ensure that women became aware of their rights. According to statistics, women made up more than 50 per cent of the Congolese population and were the population sector that was poorest and had the highest rate of illiteracy. The poverty of Congolese women had been aggravated during the armed conflict, which had also spread HIV/AIDS, a pandemic whose first victims were women and girls. She thanked the United Nations system for the humanitarian aid provided for dealing with those situations.

6. In spite of difficulties, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had, thanks to the Beijing+5 document, achieved significant progress in the promotion of women by integrating a gender perspective into its programme. She emphasized inter alia that her country had adopted the following measures: consolidation of the Women's National Council, an advisory agency of the Government, which had prepared in 2002, in collaboration with UNICEF, a catalogue of professional women at Kinshasa; the signing with UNDP in August 2002 of a document supporting the programme for the promotion of Congolese women; the publication and signing with UNFPA of a project to support the programme linked to activities for the promotion of women from 2003 to 2006; a review of the Labour Code in February 2003 to provide social benefits to women and free them from the need for marital authorization, which had previously been a prerequisite for taking employment; the creation of a Ministry of the Status of Women; the creation of a legal-information centre for women; the effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); the launching (with UNICEF support) of the public-awareness campaign for recording marriages and children in the Civil Register in order that children might obtain the benefits of inheritance in their homes. Moreover, the Ministry of the Status of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations system, had sent a team to conduct an investigation on the situations of violence in the eastern part of the country.

7. With regard to representation of women at the political level, there were six women in the Executive Council, no women had held the Vice-Presidency, and there was insufficient representation of women in the Senate and Parliament. Congolese women were preparing political and diplomatic strategies to remedy that situation,. However, despite their efforts, there was still a long way to go. In that context, the Democratic Republic of the Congo asked for the support of the international community to provide material and psychological assistance to the victims in the eastern part of the country. She expressed satisfaction at the opening at Kinshasa of an office of the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

8. **Mr. Cabral** (World Food Programme) said that the mission of the World Food Programme (WFP) was to provide food to the hungry in situations of chronic and acute food insecurity in the most severely affected regions of the world. Its contribution was important for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving the number of starving persons by the year 2015. Efforts were being made to achieve that objective by playing a concrete and pragmatic role in empowering women in their struggle against hunger and stimulating sustainable development. Food was being distributed directly to women in order that they might have control in emergency situations or in development projects in normal situations. Women were making sure that the food reached those in greatest need. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, WFP had been committed to the women linked to areas of special concern in the Beijing

Platform for Action, and those commitments were based on the fundamental role played by women as food managers and guardians of food security in households.

9. In 2002, of the 100 million children not attending school, 60 million, that is to say 60 per cent, had been girls. School food programmes could help ensure that girls attended school, and education helped girls to control their own lives. It had been demonstrated that school food programmes were beneficial in two ways: children learned better if they were well fed and school food programmes provided a powerful incentive for increasing school attendance. WFP beneficiaries allocated 75 per cent of their family budget to food. Beyond any doubt, school food projects for those families provided multiple benefits, one of which was the education of girls and small children. Some of WFP's initiatives began before the children were born. Pregnant women received modified nutritional supplements to protect their health and that of the child. With regard to AIDS, which was tearing Africa apart, WFP had created programmes which not only fed the patients but also fed the affected members of the family, such as orphans. A good nutritive diet would not cure a disease but would improve the quality of life.

10. For biological, social, cultural and economic reasons, HIV/AIDS was affecting greater numbers of women and girls than of men. Women especially suffered from the grave consequences of the pandemic because they had to bear the burden of caring for the patient and for the orphans left by the pandemic, even when they themselves lived with the virus. The effect of HIV/AIDS was most severe in those countries which were most dependent on food aid. Southern Africa was the most severely affected region of the world. Because of the high prevalence of the disease in that region, it was generally believed that HIV/AIDS in Africa had a woman's face. Women and girls were the main producers of food in many countries in which WFP operated. Women and girls spent 70 per cent of their time in agricultural and food-related tasks. Consequently HIV/AIDS seriously undermined food security in the home. When women and girls were stricken by the virus or caring for patients, they could not spend their time in food production or participate in other productive activities, and therefore their advancement was being thwarted.

11. **Mr. Husain** (Organization of the Islamic Conference), referring to the Secretary-General's report on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/58/167) recalled that although a significant part of the female population lived in rural areas, particularly in developing countries, national policies seldom took into account the importance of the roles played by women, and that social investment in women not only guaranteed their enjoyment of the human rights stated in the Convention but also constituted one of the most effective ways of combating poverty and promoting sustainable development. In general, at the Thirtieth Islamic Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, member States had been urged to give full support to the role of women, to incorporate a gender perspective into all development programmes and to devote more attention to the needs of rural women in order to ensure that they benefited from all national development programmes and policies. Member States had also been asked to adopt a participatory focus that would not only take account of women's needs and strategic interests but would also enable them to participate in various development projects and programmes.

12. The Secretary-General's report also presented the views of Member States on the convening of a high-level policy consultation at the governmental level with a view to setting priorities and developing critical strategies that would meet the complex challenges faced by rural women. The replies received by 16 July 2003, including replies from some of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, indicated great interest in the proposal. If the General Assembly wished to continue holding consultations, the Conference and its competent affiliated and specialized institutions would consider those deliberations to be of interest for their work.

13. With regard to the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, he said that contrary to what was being said in some circles, Islam had granted equality to men and women. Under Islam women had a worthy place in society and a responsible role in all aspects of community and social life and had a right to life, liberty and legitimate happiness, including the right to property, education, health services and respectable means of livelihood. The fact that those rights and opportunities had been diluted in some States members of the Organization of

the Islamic Conference resulted chiefly from the deep-rooted nature of some community practices, outmoded traditional values and, at least during the past two centuries, from colonial neglect, which had had the effect of marginalizing Islamic values. Those anomalies had been recognized, and corrective measures had been taken through legislative and other reforms which were being carried out. The rate at which that could be achieved would depend on the availability of resources and the ability of Governments and leaders of society to rid themselves of those harmful traditional practices that still existed. In that context, he welcomed the cooperation and support of the United Nations and of all good-will partners in development.

14. **Ms. Gebre-Egziabher** (New York Office of the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements, Habitat) expressed agreement with the reports that were being considered by the Third Committee, since they were fully consistent with the work and policy of the Programme for Human Settlements in connection with the promotion and empowerment of women and the incorporation of gender perspectives into all its activities. The new strategic view of the programme, which was already fully operational, established the empowerment of women as one of the main indicators of the success of its actions, and in 2001 the organization had reviewed its policy in order to strengthen the incorporation of gender perspectives into all its programmes and activities.

15. Resolution 19/16 adopted by the Programme's Governing Council in May 2003 was a historic landmark, since for the first time a resolution on women had made direct linkages with the resolutions on women's rights to adequate housing, land and property adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. It urged Governments to promote effective participation of women in human settlements planning and development and stressed the need for the right to housing and secure tenure for women living in poverty. It also raised the issue of access to finance, credit and protection from forced evictions, especially for women with HIV/AIDS. The aim was to ensure that the agency contributed effectively towards addressing the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, especially the target on improving the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

16. A gender plan of action and a handbook on gender mainstreaming had been drafted to help staff incorporate gender concerns into human-settlements programmes. In the near future there would be a reference survey on the incorporation of gender perspectives, and follow-up activities would be organized to remedy the deficiencies observed at the Programme's headquarters and regional offices. An Expert Group Meeting on Gender and Women's Issues in Human Settlements held in February 2003 had identified priority areas for action with respect to secure tenure, urban governance, urban economy and infrastructure, research and monitoring, capacity building, advocacy and information.

17. The Programme also emphasized the rights of women to the ownership of land and property, a subject on which two policy documents had been published in 2001, a report on the situation in East Africa had been published in 2002, research was being done on other subjects, such as violence against women, HIV/AIDS, orphans and housing, and household surveys were being conducted in order to analyse gender differences. It was also preparing documentation to be disseminated on the subject of policies that took account of gender and on the best practices in the matter. The Programme also supported dialogue and exchanges of views at the local level on the incorporation of gender perspectives through its Urban Management Programme and was participating in activities worldwide in collaboration with various associates. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme would continue supporting and collaborating with the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, other agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and the Third Committee in order to promote the rights of women in human settlements and ensure their equality with men.

18. **The Chairman** announced that the Syrian Arab Republic had requested, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, that Mr. John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, should be invited to present his report to the Third Committee.

19. **Mr. De Barros** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the recommendation involved an expenditure of $US6,700 in the budget for the biennium 2002-2003, chargeable to section 22 (Human Rights). The Special Rapporteur's mandate was regarded as part of ongoing activities. Credits for activities of that nature had already been included in the programme budget for the

current biennium, and therefore approval of the recommendation would not require additional allocations.

20. **The Chairman** said that a recorded vote had been requested.

21. **Mr. Gilman** (United States), speaking in explanation of his vote before the voting, said that his delegation opposed the proposal. In the current year, unlike previous years, the Commission on Human Rights had not authorized travel by the Special Rapporteur to present his report to the Third Committee. That expenditure constituted an irresponsible and unnecessary use of scarce resources which could be used more profitably. The report on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories that would be submitted to the Commission on Human Rights was available at present to all delegations. The report was markedly one-sided and contributed nothing to the cause of human rights or the search for peace in the Middle East.

22. **Ms. Astanah** (Malaysia), speaking in explanation of her vote before the voting, said that the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, at its meeting held on 9 October 2003, had expressed its support for Palestine in its deliberations on agenda item 117 (c) (Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives) and had, in particular, expressed its support for the Special Rapporteur's report. In that connection, Malaysia fully supported the proposal made by the Syrian Arab Republic.

23. **Ms. Kashmala Tariq** (Pakistan), speaking in explanation of her vote before the voting, said that Pakistan had always welcomed the opportunity to invite special rapporteurs and hear their presentations to the Committee; the participation of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories would make a positive contribution to the deliberations on that agenda item, and consequently her delegation supported the proposal made by the Syrian Arab Republic.

24. *A recorded vote was taken on a proposal to invite the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to present his report to the Third Committee*

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor□Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against:

Israel, United States of America.

Abstentions:

Australia.

25. *The proposal was adopted by 140 votes in favour, 2 against and 1 abstention.*

26. **Ms. Al-Haj-Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) expressed her delegation's thanks on behalf of the Group of Arab States to all those delegations that had voted in favour of the proposal to invite the Special Rapporteur of the Commission of Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories to present his report to the Third Committee. That support reflected the interest of the international community in the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

27. **Mr. Amorós** (Cuba) said that for his delegation the invitation to the Special Rapporteur was of a truly exceptional nature and was a reflection of the Security Council's inaction and inability to deal with the deterioration of the situation in the region.

Agenda item 113: Promotion and protection of the rights of the child (A/58/184, A/58/272, A/58/282, A/58/328, A/58/329 and A/58/420)

28. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the New York Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the main events during the current year had been the expansion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the appointment of Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro as an independent expert responsible for the United Nations study on violence against children. The amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to permit increasing the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 to 18 had entered into force on 18 November 2002, and the election of the eight additional members had been carried out at the meeting of States Parties held on 10 February 2003. The expansion of that Committee had enhanced its geographical representation and its multisectoral technical competence, although it had not necessarily increased its capacity to deal with the enormous burden of work imposed by the backlog of more than 50 reports, in addition to the new initial reports that were being received from States Parties to the two Optional Protocols to the Convention relating to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and to the involvement of children in armed conflict.

29. With a view to dealing with the constantly increasing volume of work, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had adopted at its thirty-fourth session a resolution that proposed dividing the work into two chambers, which would make it possible to consider forty-eight reports from States Parties instead of the 27 being handled at present. That recommendation had been submitted to the General Assembly for its approval, in the hope that the Committee on the Rights of the Child would be able to begin applying that new method of work by the end of 2004. In 2003 the Committee on the Rights of the Child had also approved three General Comments, on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child, on health and the development of adolescents in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and on general means for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it had organized a day of general debate on the rights of indigenous children, in which two representatives of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues had participated and recommendations on that subject had been approved.

30. During the period covered by the report Timor-Leste had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby increasing the number of States Parties to the present figure of 192. Accessions to and ratifications of the two Optional Protocols were continuing at a satisfactory pace. Three years after its adoption by the General Assembly, 64 States had ratified the Protocol on armed conflict and 65 the Protocol on the sale of children, and more than 100 had signed both instruments. He recalled that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had requested the Secretary-General to carry out an in-depth study on violence against children (General Assembly resolution 56/138). On 12 February 2003 the Secretary-General had appointed Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro of Brazil as an independent expert responsible for conducting that global study. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and the World Health Organization were collaborating closely with Mr. Pinheiro's work, specifically in facilitating information to States and other interested parties, in preparations for fund-raising and in the establishment of a small secretariat that would, it was hoped, begin operation in early 2004. Lastly, he stated that Mr. Juan Miguel Petit, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, would visit Brazil from 3 to 14 November 2003 and Paraguay in early 2004. His next report to the Commission on Human Rights would focus on the prevention of child prostitution and child pornography. In July 2003 the Special Rapporteur had sent a questionnaire to all States with a view to collecting information on those subjects.

31. **Ms. Sham Poo** (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) said that efforts to achieve a better life for children should be guided by a firm commitment to the full realization of children's rights, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Taking the Convention as the guiding principle, it was possible to work on behalf of all the world's children without discrimination, giving priority to those in greatest need. Rights were not only a goal but also a means. For years the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had taken rights as a basis to formulate cooperation programmes. UNICEF welcomed the fact that, by virtue of the May 2003 Statement of Common Understanding, United Nations agencies had undertaken to adopt an approach based on human rights, which represented an important evolution in the reform of the United Nations system.

32. During the past year there had been continuous progress with regard to the rights of the child. UNICEF welcomed the forthcoming entry into force of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. She hoped that the Protocol would greatly facilitate cooperation between States and help end trafficking in human beings, particularly children. UNICEF urged all States that had not yet done so to ratify that important instrument. The increase in the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, so that at present it had 18 members, would reduce the backlog of work and make that Committee's work more efficient. If the Committee on the Rights of the Child began to operate in two parallel chambers, it could consider almost twice as many country reports during each session. UNICEF urged all Member States to allocate the necessary resources to enable the Committee on the Rights of the Child to perform its work in two chambers.

33. Indigenous children were particularly vulnerable to many forms of abuse of their rights. There must be concerted efforts to guarantee that indigenous children, like all other children, would fully enjoy their rights. UNICEF welcomed the fact that the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had given special attention to that question throughout the year. In November 2003 UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre would publish a Digest on the rights of indigenous children. At the same time, it was well known that violence in all its forms was often an everyday reality for children. With the appointment of Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro as independent expert, the study on violence had entered a new stage, one of whose first activities would be the sending of a questionnaire to all Governments in order to collect information on the subject. The expert had met with representatives of non-governmental organizations, and the process was expected to be open and consultative. At present funds were urgently needed to establish a small secretariat for the study. UNICEF urged Member States to allocate financial resources to enable the expert to carry out his mandate.

34. Another form of violence that was continuing to victimize children was violence during armed conflicts. The lack of mechanisms to require accountability for crimes committed against children could bring consequences harmful to peace and security in the future. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was of fundamental importance because it established mandatory accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, including those committed against children, such as sexual violence, the recruitment of children under 15 years of age and international attacks on schools. In post-conflict situations UNICEF had taken a number of initiatives to ensure the involvement and protection of children in existing truth and justice commissions, for example in Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste, and it was also working to support the restoration of the rule of law.

35. One of the most egregious violations in armed conflict was the deliberate and targeted use of children as soldiers. In recent years some advances had been made in preventing the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups, thanks to the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for children and armed conflict, the Security Council, regional organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and young people themselves. In spite of those advances, as the Secretary-General had recently stated, children continued to be utilized for fighting in the wars of adults in such places as northern Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and neighbouring countries, Colombia and Myanmar. UNICEF was working to ensure the safe release of child soldiers. In Burundi an agreement had been arrived at between UNICEF and the Government for the demobilization of child soldiers. In Sri Lanka a

massive operation was being carried on, with the support of UNICEF, to free children who were fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam and return them to their families. The mass rapes of children and women that were occurring daily in conflict situations, for example in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, should shock the international community into action. In such places as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF supported initiatives aimed at caring for rape victims and ensuring that they received the medical attention and psychosocial support they needed to rebuild their lives. Collectively, there was much more that needed to be done.

36. In 2002 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises, of which UNICEF was Co-Chair, had prepared a plan of action for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and for responding to such cases. She noted the adoption of six core principles of a code of conduct for establishing minimum standards of behaviour for all humanitarian personnel. UNICEF was looking forward with interest to the publication of a Secretary-General's Bulletin that would codify the six core principles and to its incorporation into the Staff Rules and Regulations of the United Nations. Member States should consider the possibility of adopting the same six core principles into codes of conduct for their aid agencies and their military operations.

37. Landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war were indiscriminately killing children or blowing off their limbs in conflict situations all over the world. Since the end of the conflict in Iraq more than 1,000 children had become victims of the detonation of undetonated explosive devices and cluster bombs used by the parties to the conflict. Moreover, abandoned munitions posed a grave danger to the everyday lives of women and children in Iraq. UNICEF and its associated agencies were actively engaged in reducing the proliferation of small arms. UNICEF called upon Governments to act responsibly with regard to the arms trade and to establish binding international agreements to control it.

38. The participation of young people in family life, school and the community was crucial for developing their potential and ensuring their protection, especially in times of conflict and crisis. UNICEF was developing good practices and guidance to serve as a framework for protective activities and assistance aimed at adolescents and would facilitate systematic programming for and with young people. During the past 15 years UNICEF had made a significant investment in establishing standards and gathering information on children which had yielded a methodology and an extensive institutional database on the situation of children everywhere in the world. While the database was fairly well developed with regard to education, health and nutrition, adequate data were not available on the effects of armed conflict on children. At present UNICEF was collaborating with the United States Social Sciences Research Council and the Research Network on Children and Armed Conflict in order to enhance the work of data collection and analysis on the subject.

39. UNICEF was firmly committed to efforts aimed at attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Many of those goals coincided with those enunciated in the final document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, entitled A World Fit for Children. For the goal of eliminating gender disparity in education by 2005, the deadline was approaching rapidly. Since education was a right of all girls and was indispensable for development, UNICEF urged all Governments to take action to ensure that all girls attended school. The Millennium Development Goals deserved the most careful attention. UNICEF was engaged in ensuring reliable and effective monitoring of the progress made, taking advantage of its experience in data collection and analysis. Together with other agencies, in particular those associated with the United Nations Development Group, UNICEF had undertaken to prepare a common database (DevInfo) for monitoring goals. UNICEF invited States to use the common database and facilitate the exchange of information between their systems and that database. The international community had set goals, made commitments and acquired tools, the first of them being the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, which should serve to help it assume its responsibility to children and fulfil its promise to create a world fit for children.

40. **Ms. Borzi** (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, asked what action UNICEF had taken to deal with the problem of trafficking in children, which caused ever-growing concern in the European Union.

41. **Ms. Groux** (Switzerland) expressed satisfaction at the election of the new members of the Committee

on the Rights of the Child and at the fact that attention had been given to the recommendations on ways to relieve that Committee's enormous workload. With regard to the proposal to create two chambers for that Committee, she wished to know whether it was part of a possible reform of agencies created by virtue of treaties or whether it was solely a short-term measure that could be extended if it was found useful. She also wished to have more details on the budget implications the division of that Committee into two chambers and on the measures that would be adopted to guarantee that the geographical distribution of the chambers would be equitable and that there would be coherence between the work and views of that Committee's two chambers.

42. **Mr. Bazel** (Afghanistan) expressed his Government's gratitude for the attention that UNICEF had given to his country and announced that the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health, in association with UNICEF, had launched a campaign to register children under one year of age, which would be extended until the end of 2003. Since the autumn of 2001, after dealing with the most urgent humanitarian assistance, UNICEF had concentrated its work in Afghanistan on endeavouring to ensure that children went back to school, immunizing children against infectious diseases, alleviating malnutrition and reducing maternal mortality. However, after a prolonged conflict situation, Afghanistan must have more financial resources and a continued commitment from the international community in order to be able to deal with the large investments needed in the education and health sectors.

43. **Mr. Simancas Gutiérrez** (Mexico) said that, in connection with the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, he would like to know whether the code of conduct for humanitarian staff with regard to minimum standards of behaviour had worked, what UNICEF's experience on the subject had been and whether it was necessary to revise the code or whether that document represented a step in the right direction towards ending practices involving sexual exploitation and abuse.

44. **Ms. Mohamed Ahmed** (Sudan), referring to truth and justice commissions in post-conflict situations, said she wished to know more details on the type of activities provided by UNICEF in those circumstances, especially after the signing of peace agreements. With regard to databases relating to different aspects of childhood, she wished to know whether UNICEF was engaged in data-collection activities in Africa, especially concerning the effects of conflicts on children. She also requested more details on UNICEF's collaboration with the European Union in preparing overall European Union strategy on the question of children and armed conflict.

45. **Ms. Sham Poo** (United Nations Children's Fund) replied that the Protocol to Suppress, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which would soon enter into force, could not resolve all the problems in that sphere but represented a valid point of departure. Another priority matter for UNICEF was studying the need for legal reforms in countries in which cooperation programmes or activities were being carried on and for public-awareness campaigns in all spheres of society, from the political to the family sphere. With regard to Afghanistan, it was gratifying to know that, as a result of UNICEF's work and the invaluable cooperation of the Government of Afghanistan and the families themselves, in 2003 more than four million children, including one million girls, had returned to school for the first time. UNICEF continued to support various activities in Afghanistan, in particular providing assistance in school rehabilitation, collaboration with the United Nations Office for Project Services, but more financial resources were needed to continue those activities. The register of births, such as had been established in Afghanistan, was important for enabling countries to make sure that all children had the support they needed. As to sexual exploitation, UNICEF had carried out a series of training activities at its headquarters and regional and country offices for UNICEF and national staff and would monitor the matter very closely. In reply to the question raised by the Sudan, she said that UNICEF had a presence in 158 countries, some of which were in conflict or post-conflict situations. The nature of UNICEF's support activities could change during the conflicts and change again after the conflicts had ended. The effects of some of those activities, particularly with regard to child protection, would become especially visible in future generations which would have a better understanding of the importance of developing their country in a situation of peace. With regard to the common database on children, she mentioned the special importance attached by UNICEF to the work of collecting data relating to Africa, which were highly useful for monitoring the progress of

collaboration projects in which UNICEF was participating on that continent.

46. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the New York Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), replying to the questions asked by the representative of the European Union, said that his Office had continued to cooperate with UNICEF and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in implementing the standards of behaviour relating to human rights and trafficking in persons, which had been submitted to the Economic and Social Council in 2002 and whose application should help eliminate the problem of trafficking in persons.

47. In reply to the questions asked by the representative of Switzerland, he said the States Parties to the Convention of the Rights of the Child were aware that the Committee on the Rights of the Child could not deal with the large number of reports being submitted to it, each of which would require careful attention and the formulation of recommendations that would serve to improve the situation of children; the decision of the States Parties to expand that Committee was appreciated. It would mark the start of a new stage and might set an example for other committees. On the question of geographical balance, he agreed with the representative of Switzerland that a balanced focus in the consideration of country reports should be applied and said that the methods of work of the Committee of the Rights of the Child should be harmonized.

48. With regard to the financial consequences of the expansion, he said that the consideration was in its initial phase and that information of a more detailed nature could not be provided until the end of 2004, when more exact data would be available. All the bodies dealing with the implementation of treaties met periodically with a view to comparing methods and operating more quickly and effectively. It was important to minimize expenditures, although it must be made clear that the resources disbursed would be used to improve the fate of the victims of human-rights violations and therefore represented money well spent. He emphasized that the United Nations devoted only 1.5 per cent of its budget to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

49. In reply to the question raised by the representative of Mexico relating to the code of conduct, he said that that code had been prepared by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force, with the participation of the major international non-governmental organizations, for the purpose of ensuring that the agents of States and of international non-governmental organizations that worked in the field to help children and held positions of authority and financial power would not contribute to aggravating the exploitation of those children. Those rules of behaviour continued to be reviewed periodically, and he hoped that they would serve to prevent such abuses and punish the perpetrators.

50. **Ms. Thandar** (Myanmar) said that in the written statement of the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF it was stated that Myanmar was the State with the largest number of child soldiers in the world. Myanmar was not yet a party to the Optional Protocol, but the minimum age for military recruitment had been 18 years for the past several decades; she therefore did not understand what criterion had been used and wished to know whether any organization had carried out an in-country study to arrive at the conclusions contained in the written statement. She also asked whether child soldiers, that is to say, those under 18 years of age, existed only in developing countries or whether they existed in developed countries as well.

51. **Ms. Adjalova** (Azerbaijan) said that her delegation was especially interested in UNICEF's work in relation to children in armed conflicts, and in particular its activities for the benefit of children who were internal refugees and displaced persons. In Azerbaijan that particularly vulnerable sector of the population was included in general projects carried on by UNICEF in the country, but specific assistance was needed. She asked whether UNICEF had plans for carrying out, or was already carrying out, programmes of that type in other regions or countries and whether it could provide specific examples in the matter.

52. **Mr. Amorós** (Cuba) asked the Director of the New York Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights whether the proposed division of the Committee on the Rights of the Child into two chambers was a permanent arrangement or whether its object was solely to deal with the backlog of work that that Committee had to deal with at present. He also asked whether under the proposed new practice all members of that Committee would consider and participate in decision-making on the final recommendations and decisions relating to the reports submitted. He asked the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF whether she could give more

information on UNICEF's collaboration with the European Union in the development of a strategy relating to children and armed conflict.

53. **Mr. Alenezi** (Kuwait) asked the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF about the strategy currently being followed with regard to mine-clearing in Iraq, in view of the recent unstable situation, and specifically whether that work had been continued or interrupted.

54. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the New York Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), replying to the question asked by the representative of Cuba, said that it was clear that the division of the Committee on the Rights of the Child into two chambers represented an attempt to improve the functioning, effectiveness and rapidity of the consideration of the reports and of the submission of recommendations on the subject by that Committee. Since the initiative was a new one that was still under consideration, it was as yet too soon to know whether that arrangement would be permanent or short-term. At the end of 2004 the Office would be able to provide more information on the subject. With regard to the question of geographical balance, he said that the members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child could answer that question better than he but that his understanding was that all of that Committee's members participated in its work, even though each country had a designated rapporteur.

55. **Ms. Gibbons** (Division of Policy and Planning, UNICEF), replying to the question asked by the representative of Myanmar, said that the figure relating to child soldiers in that country which appeared in the written statement was based on the Secretary-General's report of November 2002; no study had been conducted in the country, but the data came from a report of Human Rights Watch. Replying to the question from the representative of Azerbaijan, she said that UNICEF supported many programmes for the protection and reuniting of internal refugees and displaced persons and that she could provide the Azerbaijan delegation with specific examples at a bilateral meeting. Replying to the question asked by the representative of Cuba, she said that UNICEF was providing assistance to the European Union for the application of a strategy relating to children in armed conflicts in some 30 countries. Replying to the question from the representative of Kuwait, she said that, as everyone knew, UNICEF's mine-clearing work in Iraq had been limited by the current insecurity in the country but that there still was in the field an Iraqi team that was doing everything in its power to continue that work. She hoped that the situation would improve.

56. **Ms. Borzi** (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the associated countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) said that at its special session on children held in May 2002 the General Assembly had considered the progress made during the past decade and had recognized that much still remained to be done. The necessary measures to realize the rights of all children must be taken, with special attention to marginalized children, bearing in mind that human rights must be respected both in times of peace and in times of war. The international community had a clear legal standard for its work of promoting and protecting the rights of the child, namely, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was the human-rights treaty to which the largest number of States had acceded, and its Optional Protocols. The European Union urged those States that had not yet done so to sign and ratify or accede to the Convention and its Optional Protocols. In that connection, it was a matter of concern that a great many reservations concerning that instrument had been lodged, and he urged States to withdraw reservations that were incompatible with the objectives of the Convention. The Committee on the Rights of the Child was playing a fundamental role in promoting more effective implementation of those instruments. The European Union supported the work of that Committee and appealed to all the States Parties to the Convention to cooperate fully with it and fulfil their reporting obligations. The European Union welcomed the fact that the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child had been increased and hoped that that body would be able to deal effectively with the monitoring of the Convention's two Optional Protocols.

57. It was essential not only to take measures specifically aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of the child but also to incorporate a children's-rights perspective into all activities at both international and national levels. The European Union considered important all aspects of the realization of the rights of the child, as could be seen inter alia from the draft resolution submitted in cooperation with other

States for consideration and approval by the Third Committee. The international community must intensify its efforts to ensure respect for the rights of children in armed conflicts. In that connection, the European Union welcomed the measures adopted by the Security Council, in particular, the adoption of resolution 1460 (2003) of 30 January 2003, and the report submitted by the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. It also supported the work done in that sphere by the Special Representative, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other actors, including non-governmental organizations.

58. The European Union vigorously supported the Secretary-General's appeal for an "era of application" of international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by armed conflict and called upon the parties mentioned in the report and its annex to end immediately the recruitment, use or other victimization of children in armed conflict. Systematic monitoring of and reporting on compliance with Security Council resolution 1460 (2003) was needed. The European Union also urged the Secretary-General to ensure the early completion of a comprehensive assessment of the scope and effectiveness of United Nations response to the issue of children affected by armed conflict, as called for in the resolution adopted in 2002. The European Union expressed its commitment to formulating and adopting a set of guidelines on children and armed conflict by the end of 2003, if possible. With a view to that objective, the Presidency of the European Union had included those guidelines among its human-rights priorities and had held an informal meeting of experts on 29 September at the UNICEF Centre in Florence. The European Union had also undertaken a fruitful dialogue and established a cooperative relationship with the Special Representative and his office. She also referred to the conclusions of the Council of the European Union on cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations on crisis management. The European Union remained concerned at the situation on the ground, in particular the continuing recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. In that context, she urged States to speed the process of ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which classified as war crimes the conscription or enlistment of persons under 15 years of age in national armed forces or their use as active participants in hostilities at the international or local level. The European Union wished to reaffirm the need to put an end to impunity by investigating and bringing to justice any perpetrators of crimes against children.

59. Children continued to be victims of many forms of sexual exploitation, such as trafficking, prostitution, pornography, acts of paedophilia, sexual abuse and harassment, which represented an even greater risk in situation of armed conflict. The European Union supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Sexual exploitation of children was directly linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The European Union urged all States and the international community to strengthen their efforts to protect the rights of children affected by HIV/AIDS, including their right to education, information, health and protection from abuse, neglect and discrimination, and it noted the need to provide adolescents with access to psychological support and sex education. Other forms of child exploitation were also widespread. The European Union was alarmed at the increase in the worst forms of child labour, including all forms of slavery. Key tools for combating them were free, accessible and good-quality education and the adoption of core labour standards. She appealed to those States which had not yet done so to ratify ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 and on States Parties to comply in a timely manner with their reporting obligations.

60. In regard to juvenile offences, it was important to bear in mind that the Convention on the Rights of the Child unreservedly prohibited the imposition of the death penalty on persons who had been under 18 years of age when the offence had been committed. The European Union appealed to all States that still retained the death penalty not to impose it on juvenile offenders. She stressed the obligation of all States to protect children deprived of freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Such obligation was not subject to any derogation or exception.

61. A key factor in reducing poverty was the realization of the right to education, which contributed to promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development. The European Union urged all States to take the necessary measures to eliminate all obstacles to the full realization of the right to education of all boys and girls, placing particular emphasis on the education of girls. It also supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and

encouraged States to cooperate with her in the fulfilment of her mandate. Children were not only the future of mankind but also its present, and consequently they must be given careful and constant attention. To that end, the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to working together with other Member States and the United Nations system in order to find the most effective way to strengthen support for the rights of the child.

62. **Mr. Estrada Meyer** (Brazil) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and the adolescent lay at the core of Brazil's social and human rights policies. He therefore reaffirmed Brazil's commitment to fully implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its broad vision of the protection, promotion and realization of the rights of children and adolescents was a continuing source of inspiration for Brazil's legislative authorities. It was also the basic legal reference for the protection of children and a human-rights treaty which had gained almost universal application. In the near future Brazil would submit its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, thus reaffirming its political will to comply with the international commitments it had assumed. Brazil had also signed the Convention's two Optional Protocols, thus complementing its international commitments in that important field. In the context of the standing invitation extended by the Government of Brazil to all mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission's Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and the use of children in pornography would visit Brazil between 3 and 14 November. Brazil looked forward with interest to the opportunity to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and hoped that his conclusions and recommendations would help in combating the exploitation of children in the country.

63. His Government, in its efforts to overcome inequality and economic and social injustice, had been devoting particular attention to children and adolescents, since they were the ones most affected by the dire effects of poverty, hunger and exclusion. Priority was being given to children and adolescents in programmes such as "Fome Zero" -- "Zero Hunger"-- one of the fundamental policies of the President of Brail aimed at promoting measures for combating hunger and guaranteeing the people's food security through the application of a broad variety of initiatives that struck at the structural causes of poverty. Programmes for eliminating forced labour and combating child labour were being carried out, with special emphasis on children and adolescents employed in domestic work, as well as programmes to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly in tourism. High priority had been given to developing and improving elementary education and to the struggle against racial discrimination towards children, particularly those of African and indigenous ancestry.

64. He welcomed the recent expansion of the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 10 experts to 18, enabling it to be better prepared to monitor the implementation of the Convention among its many States Parties and to have a more balanced geographical representation, as well as to select experts from the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, where the great majority of children and adolescents lived. He mentioned the selection of experts from Argentina and Paraguay, who, together with the Brazilian expert, would make possible a substantial representation of MERCOSUR in the Committee on the Rights of the Child, producing a positive impact on the work of that body and facilitating a better understanding of the issue of children's and adolescents' rights in the subregion.

65. **Ms. Groux** (Switzerland) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols demonstrated the importance of international cooperation for the realization of the rights of all children. Such cooperation was essential in the fight against sexual exploitation, particularly child pornography on the Internet, and against trafficking in children, whether for economic purposes or for those of sexual exploitation. Fifty per cent of the victims of trafficking in persons were children, which constituted a grave violation of their dignity and fundamental rights, including the rights to protection, physical integrity, education and health. The international community must intensify its efforts, especially in the areas of prevention, education, rehabilitation and social reintegration of children victimized by trafficking. At the same time, Switzerland was prepared to cooperate with Mr. Pinheiro, the independent expert responsible for the study on violence against children, and it called on all States and specialized agencies of the United Nations and on civil society as a whole to do likewise. It was very important that that study, called for by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session, should be carried out as soon as possible in order to improve the

United Nations system's ability to deal with anti-child violence and facilitate the preparation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child of a General Comment on the relevant articles of the Convention.

66. Respect for the rule of law was necessary both in times of war and in times of peace. The Geneva Conventions, their 1977 Additional Protocols and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that related to children's participation in armed conflict constituted the essential and indispensable bases for protecting children affected by conflict, whose vulnerability was evident whether they were internal displaced persons or refugees, whether they were recruited by the armed forces voluntarily or by force. In that connection, she observed that the voluntary recruitment of children by non-State armed groups constituted a real challenge and could not be effectively prevented until the motives of such voluntary participation were better understood. The only way to ensure the success of the international community in the prevention of children's participation in hostilities was the universal ratification of the Convention's Optional Protocol, and Switzerland urged States that had not yet ratified that Convention to do so as soon as possible, without making any reservations that would reduce its scope.

67. Switzerland was awaiting with great interest the general assessment, requested by the General Assembly in 2002, on the scope and effectiveness of the measures adopted by the United Nations system for children affected by armed conflict, and it hoped that the recommendations arising from it would help to improve efforts in that sphere. Switzerland welcomed the achievements of Mr. Tune, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the issue of children and armed conflict, in advocacy and mainstreaming of the rights of the child in all United Nations activities and into UNICEF's field activities, in increasing the number of child protection advisors in peacekeeping operations, as well as the resolutions adopted by the Security Council in recent years.

68. **Ms. Tincopa** (Peru) said that the actions of her Government at the international level were guided by the commitments made in the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child and at the summits and special sessions held since that time. At the regional level, the outcome documents of the various meetings of ministers and high officials responsible for children and adolescents served to enrich international features and adapt them to country realities. In that context, Peru had been designing and implementing integrated social policies aimed at strengthening the higher interests of boys, girls and adolescents, which was understood as the highest possible degree of physical and mental health, with a view to achieving their well being.

69. Childhood and adolescence indicators were basic reference points of a country's progress and of its future possibilities, and the levels of investment in children and adolescents reflected and guaranteed the sustainability of development proposals, strategies for combating poverty and efforts to strengthen democratic institutions. For that reason, Peru had adopted in July 2002 the National Agreement on Govern ability, which embodied State policies for the coming years that directly reflected the commitments of the Government and society as a whole to the promotion and protection of childhood and adolescence, health, nutrition, and education, among other matters. That policy was complemented at the regulatory level by the provisions contained in the Children's and Adolescents' Code, which adapted the 1990 Convention to the national level, and by the provisions of the National Action Plan for Childhood and Adolescence, 2002-2010. One of the Government's priorities was fighting poverty, which had a greater impact on boys, girls and adolescents, who often needed to enter the labour market at an early age, confronting situations of neglect, economic and sexual exploitation, early and unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, drug addiction or alcoholism.

70. Her Government's strategic actions for dealing with that difficult situation were focused on a number of areas. In the matter of health, those actions were focused on achieving expansion of coverage and access to high-quality health services that met the needs of children and adolescents. With regard to their sexual and reproductive health, efforts were being made to promote a healthful way of life and gender equity and to prevent pregnancy, complementing health services with the informative work of guidance and counselling. In education, even though the rate of school attendance was above 95 per cent, steps must be taken to deal with the problems of keeping children in school and improving the quality of teaching. There were still differences in access to education between urban and rural areas, as well as differences in quality between public and private education. The reform of secondary

education had been initiated in order to adapt it better to the needs of adolescents in gaining access to higher education and to life as citizens and workers. As regards equality of opportunity and non-discrimination, the Government was working to make sure that boys, girls and adolescents, including those belonging to minority groups or groups suffering discrimination, such as indigenous persons and persons of African ancestry, had access to equal services and opportunities that would enable them to develop on an equal footing, with due regard to the multicultural and multiethnic nature of society. Lastly, in order to achieve the goals outlined, there must be coordinated work between the State and the representatives of civil society, as well as participation by boys, girls and adolescents as essential agents of their own development.

71. **Mr. Zaya Shiweva** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, said that a number of States members of the Community were currently collaborating with UNICEF to incorporate the provisions of the outcome document of the special session, entitled A World Fit for Children, into existing national action plans, and others would soon start developing their national action plans. Millions of children continued to suffer degrading poverty, hunger, malnutrition, exploitation as child soldiers and inadequate social and economic conditions. Children were becoming increasingly vulnerable to preventable diseases and to the pandemic of human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). Many children were being wounded or killed, orphaned or displaced as a result of armed conflicts. The States members of the Community were firmly committed to ensuring the creation of an environment fit for the well being of their children. Children who enjoyed good health and quality education had greater opportunities to become adults who could create better living conditions and contribute to economic progress.

72. The members of the Community had undertaken to improve their systems of primary health care. In collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, they continued to work towards establishing sustainable immunization services for children, one of the strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of reducing child mortality rates. National immunization days and other awareness campaigns about diseases such as poliomyelitis and tuberculosis had contributed greatly to making citizens more aware of the importance of primary health care. However, the effects of those campaigns could be lasting only if investment in those countries' health sector was increased. The Community was grateful for the tireless work of UNICEF and other development partners in mobilizing resources for immunization programmes and many other health programmes.

73. In the field of education the Community had adopted an innovative policy that was responsive to needs. The issues of basic education and the elimination of gender inequalities had been integrated into the sect oral plans of most of its member countries. In addition, the Education for All goals agreed under the Dakar Framework for Action 2000, as well as the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education, continued to be factored into national education plans. Consultations with civil society and donors were becoming increasingly institutionalised in the education sector, creating more capacity-building opportunities and policy dialogue with other sectors. The exchange of experience on innovations between the Ministries of Education of the Community members provided useful lessons and promoted the transfer and circulation of best practices. However, the efforts of those countries to offer quality education continued to be hampered by the scarcity of financing, and therefore they asked the international community to provide more resources in order that they might meet the goals of the Plan of Action resulting from the special session on children.

74. The Community recognized that the problems of children with disabilities affected many sectors and required special attention at all levels. It therefore welcomed the creation of a working group to consider all proposals made for the new International Comprehensive and Integral Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. The Community would make sure that the Convention took into account the special needs and concerns of children with disabilities.

75. HIV/AIDS continued to pose a major threat to the development gains made up to the present. At a Special Summit held at Maseru, Lesotho, the Heads of State and Government of the Southern African Development Community had approved the creation of a regional fund for the implementation of its HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework and Programme of Action for 2003-2007. The Summit had also approved a declaration on combating HIV/AIDS in the region,

which identified a number of priority areas, such as access to health care, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, testing and treatment, resource mobilization, development-oriented approach, monitoring and evaluation. HIV/AIDS was also making orphans of an increasing number of children. In that connection, Community Governments had undertaken to formulate programmes and policies that would strengthen the role of the family and community-based health care in support of orphans and other vulnerable children.

76. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons had dramatically increased the number of child victims in armed conflicts. During the past decade the use of those weapons had claimed more than 20 million victims in Africa, many of whom were children. Therefore the international community must make a greater effort to alleviate the problems posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The Community called upon all States to adopt effective measures to control the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons to parties in armed conflicts. In the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict the minimum age for compulsory recruitment and participation in hostilities was set at 18 years, and the minimum age for voluntary recruitment at 16 years. Yet the provisions of the Protocol continued to be flouted in war-affected countries, in which boys and girls barely eight years of age were being recruited by force as combatants, human shields, porters, slaves and sexual partners. Many of them had died, and those who had been able to escape constituted a large majority of internal displaced persons. The international community had a moral obligation to stop those practices and bring the perpetrators to justice. In that connection the members of the Community welcomed the entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which had classified as war crimes the conscription, enlistment or use in hostilities of children younger than 15 years, among others. The classification by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour was yet another positive step towards protecting the rights of children in armed conflicts.

77. The Community welcomed the increase in the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and appreciated that Committee's decision to devote one day of general discussion periodically to a specific article of the Convention or to a theme related to the rights of the child in order to enhance understanding of the content and implications of the Convention. At a time when the issue of the promotion and protection of the rights of the child was a prominent part of the international agenda, it was essential to find a way to implement the Plan of Action of the special session on children to ensure that the world was a safer place for the children of all countries. As in earlier years, the members of the Community were sponsoring a draft resolution on the girl-child, which they hoped would be adopted by consensus.

78. **Mr. Seyed Salehi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) welcomed the special importance attached to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child as an item of the General Assembly's agenda, since it indicated a trend in the international community to respond to the violation of children's rights. Children were still being deprived of their rights, and their basic needs were still being neglected; that remained a great problem for humanity. The violation of the rights of the child continued to be manifested in various ways in many parts of the world. There were continued occurrences of such violations, including smuggling, trafficking in children and the abusive use of child labour, sexual abuses in which children were used for purposes of prostitution and pornography, sexual tourism, armed conflicts, lack of access to proper education and hygiene, and the alarming growth in the number of street children, mainly due to poverty and the break-up of the family environment.

79. According to the UNICEF report The State of the World's Children 2003, trafficking in children had become a billion-dollar-a-year business, victimizing approximately 1.2 million children annually. Trafficking in children for exploitation in agriculture and domestic service had recently emerged as a problem, and trafficking in girls to force them into prostitution had been a long-standing concern. There had also been a huge upsurge in the number of children from some developing countries who had become victims of trafficking towards Western Europe, and it was believed that many boys had been forced into military service as soldiers, porters, messengers, cooks or sexual slaves. About 11 million children under five years of age were dying every year of preventable diseases, and almost half of the 40 million persons

displaced by conflicts or human-rights violations were children.

80. Improving the situation of children and creating conditions that would enable them to live a life of dignity were part of the obligations of Governments. Nevertheless, in the light of the fact that the problem of human development in all its facets, especially the elimination of poverty, was far from having been solved in the world, the members of the world community, and especially the developing countries, would encounter difficulties in attaining the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The international community would have to make a serious effort to tackle those problems and create appropriate and effective economic and political structures that would directly affect the status of millions of children throughout the world. Emphasis must be placed on the protection of children victimized by atrocities committed in time of war or armed conflict, especially children in territories under foreign occupation. In connection with that question, his delegation appealed to the international community to take urgent and decisive action to put an end to the crimes being committed in the occupied Palestinian territories, so as to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian children.

81. At the same time, one of the most effective ways to protect children from the many dangers threatening them in various societies was to reinforce the institution of the family as the basic unit of society and strengthen family ties. The main responsibility for the protection, education and development of children was borne by the family. If the family could raise children in a safe and stable environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, that would prevent children from leaving their homes and being exposed to various forms of exploitation.

82. At the national level, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, had vigorously pursued the effective realization of the objectives set forth in the Convention. Thus, a large part of the budget was being allocated to social affairs, particularly the sectors of general education, art and culture, health, treatment and nutrition, social security and rehabilitation, physical education, skill development and research, sectors in which funds were assigned directly to ensuring respect for the social and cultural rights of children and women. There were also credits in other sectors, which were being indirectly devoted to improving the less developed areas and were contributing to the realization of children's and women's rights.

83. Juvenile courts of the Islamic Republic of Iran had taken steps to benefit from worldwide advances related to the rights of the child and to meet the special needs of children and adolescents in order to create a decisive change in the methods of judgement in that domain. In order to promote the educational level of the judges for the special courts for children with regard to children's-rights issues and familiarize them with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a number of training workshops had been organized in collaboration with UNICEF in various Iranian cities. The Prisons Organization had drafted plans to construct and open Correction and Rehabilitation Centres at all provincial centres by the end of the country's Third Development Plan. The offices of all provincial Directors General had been required to rent appropriate places to house the Correction and Rehabilitation Centres for the time being and to transfer all prisoners under the age of 18 to those places.

84. On the other hand, it was noteworthy that the Islamic Republic of Iran was considering the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. To that end, his Government had started a comprehensive study on the ratification of the Protocol in keeping with the views of the United Nations. Once that study was completed, the matter would be submitted as a bill for the approval of Parliament. It was hoped that that measure would result in the more efficient fulfilment of the tasks enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

85. **Ms. Al-Qahtani** (United Arab Emirates) said that her delegation appreciated the valuable efforts made by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and the attention given to that subject at all international conferences relating to peace, security and development. However, it deplored the fact that despite the ratification of conventions and protocols on the rights of the child and the holding of numerous international conferences on the subject, millions of children continued living in extreme poverty, suffering from diseases, including AIDS, sexual abuse and recruitment in civil wars and regional conflicts. The improvement of children's living conditions and the

protection of their rights required resolving current disputes, putting an end to foreign occupation and implementing United Nations resolutions and recommendations relating to the implementation of development programmes in poor countries.

86. Convinced that the development of human beings began in childhood, the Government of the United Arab Emirates had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had shown its commitment to fulfilling its provisions, in the context of Islamic tradition and the country's cultural heritage, through the advances it had made in the areas of health, education and social services, which had been praised by UNICEF in its report for 2003. The report had also praised the Higher Council for Motherhood and Childhood, established in early 2003, which was responsible for organizing public and private efforts that involved children's welfare and coordinating relations with regional and international organizations. Furthermore, the wife of the President of the State, who was also Chairperson of the General Union of Women, had been named Personality of the Year in 2001 by UNICEF, in recognition of her constant efforts to alleviate the suffering of children everywhere in the world.

87. Among the advances made by the United Arab Emirates in the area of children's welfare were the extension of maternity leave to six months, the establishment of a system of free education at all levels for all citizens of the country, the creation of special programmes for highly gifted children and the establishment of preventive-medicine centres, rehabilitation centres for children with special needs, medical services in schools and vaccination programmes.

88. The United Arab Emirates regarded as very alarming the situation of children in the occupied Palestinian territories, who, in addition to poverty and illness, were suffering the devastating consequences of the policies of blockade and destruction pursued by Israel in violation of all international treaties and of international humanitarian law. She also recalled the suffering of the children of Iraq and Afghanistan, who were living in wretched socio-economic conditions. Her delegation therefore appealed to the international community to find decisive and lasting solutions for restoring justice and saving children all over the world from violence, poverty and oppression.

89. **Ms. Hole** (Norway) said that Norway regarded the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a fundamental instrument for the realization of the democratic rights of children and young people and had recently incorporated the Convention into its national legal order and had submitted its third report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Her delegation welcomed the increase from 10 to 18 in the number of that Committee's members and considered it an honour that a Norwegian expert was among them. The Committee on the Rights of the Child was playing a crucial role in helping Member States fulfil their obligations; her delegation appreciated that Committee's measures to facilitate the submission of reports and considered it essential that all Member States should fulfil their reporting obligations.

90. Her delegation agreed with the recommendations of the report prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and shared the view that it was essential and urgent to enter "an era of implementation" of current instruments and commitments. It found encouraging the progress made in incorporating the question of children and armed conflict into all of the work of the United Nations, for example by deploying advisors on the protection of minors into peacekeeping operations. Norway supported that initiative and would welcome the submission of relevant evaluation reports. At the same time, it regarded as very alarming the fact that children were still being recruited to serve as soldiers in armed conflicts, as the Secretary-General stated in his report (S/2002/1299), and it urged all the parties mentioned in the annex of that report to put an end to that practice at once.

91. The struggle against poverty was essential for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. For that reason, her Government had approved a Plan of Action for combating poverty in the South that covered the period until the year 2015, and it had set the goal of increasing official development assistance from the present value of 0.93 per cent to 1 per cent of the gross national product by 2005. A substantial portion of those funds would continue to be devoted to children, particularly to the educational sector and, above all, to the education of girls. Advances in the well-being of children had also been severely hampered by the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, a disease whose spread was due to poverty, ignorance and gender discrimination.

Norway had integrated the struggle against HIV/AIDS into most of its cooperation activities for development.

92. Another problem that gave concern to her delegation was trafficking in persons, of which thousands of women and children were victims. Trafficking was an export-import business that generated enormous profits. Her delegation welcomed the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Her Government would continue to participate in the international efforts to combat those grave crimes and human rights violations through its most recent Plan of Action against trafficking in women and children. At the national level, her Government would concentrate on the needs of victims, including the organizing of shelters for abused women and the training of those who helped the victims. It was essential to tackle the causes of the problem of trafficking in persons, which were poverty, social deprivation and lack of education and employment opportunities.

93. She stressed the importance of regarding children never as part of the problem but as part of the solution, since children were the future. Investing in children and young people meant investing in development and in poverty reduction. That must be taken into account at the World Summit on the Information Society, which would be held at Geneva in December 2003. It was important to facilitate children's access to information and communication technologies and strengthening measures for guaranteeing their safety on the Internet.

The meeting rose at 6.00 p.m.